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LIBERTYVILLE — Nearly a decade in the making, the Butler Lake dredging project is officially out of the starting blocks.

"When complete, this restoration project will make Butler Lake a recreational haven for Lake County residents for years to come," said U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, who helped secure \$700,000 from the federal government for the \$1.2 million work. "I am proud that we joined local and federal governments to save Butler Lake."

Libertyville Mayor Jeff Harger noted that plans for the dredging actually started back in 1999.

"This has been a long time in the process," he said. "We all recognize the importance of this project. Libertyville is very fortunate to have this amenity in its community."

"This has gone through two mayors and I'm the third," he added.

The village is contributing \$562,000 spread over two years, the length of the project.

This fall, Libertyville-based Matrix Environmental will start construction on a sediment dewatering facility the Lake County farm property just off Winchester Road.

The dredged material will be made up of fine silt mixed with organic material and it will be pumped to the Winchester site through a temporary pipeline. The dredge material is not supposed to cause any odor problems.

The second phase of the project will be the restoration of habitat that includes a native prairie buffer around the entire northern part of the lake on the north side of Lake Street. There will be riffles built, which help oxygenate the water and attract fish and some fishing piers.

The southern portion of the lake will have bank stabilization work done along the shores which will include native plants. Greg Moore, plant ecologist for the Army Corps of Engineers, said they will reshape the banks to reduce erosion and place a plastic mat down.

"We will plant it with a native water willow, not to be mistaken for willow shrub or tree. It will be planted in six inches of water and will serve to break the velocity of the wave action. It's a native plant solution," he said.

He said the lake does not have a lot of Eurasian water milfoil, an invasive aquatic plant, or purple loosestrife. They will steer clear of the cattail areas and native aquatic plant areas.

Buckthorn will be removed from the area west of the biggest part of the lake near the high school and native grasses and forbs, broad-leafed plants, will be planted.

The lake will be dredged to eight feet, which should allow fish to over winter and allow a predator/prey self-sustaining fish population. The lake has experienced a number of fish kills over the years when oxygen is depleted and fish begin dying. It was last dredged in the late 1960s.

Howard Lang has lived on the lake for 31 years and regularly enjoys walking around it. He has seen the fish kills firsthand. "I was really saddened to see that," he said.

He had a small sailboat at one time and he is thinking of getting another one once the restoration is complete.

"It's tremendous," he said of the plans.

Libertyville Trustee Dean Larson knows the history of the lake and said there were two things he wanted to see done before he died: See the American Legion Hall refurbished downtown and see Butler Lake dredged.

"Now I'll have to come up with something new," he joked. He said students from the conservation club at Libertyville High School found one area of the lake was 20 feet deep and fed by a spring.

He said at one time long ago there were plans to turn the lake into a cranberry bog and another plan to make it a golf course. Owned by the village, the lake was a Works Project Administration program in the 1930s during the Depression.

Cathy and John Silvis attended the press conference Monday with their 8-year-old son, Nick, who likes to fish on the lake.

"He thinks he's fishing, but he mainly catches weeds," laughed his mother. They have been living by Butler Lake for two years.

"We always wished they would do something to make the lake more attractive," she said.